

REMARKS

This Amendment is responsive to the final Office Action mailed on November 24, 2004. Claims 1, 6, 11, and 17 are amended. Claims 1, 4-6, and 8-23 are pending.

As a preliminary matter, Applicants would like to thank the Examiner for the courteous and productive telephone interview conducted on January 3, 2005, and for the follow up conversations which took place on February 23, and 24, 2005, details of which are set forth below.

The Examiner has indicated that claims 6, 8, and 11-13 contain allowable subject matter.

Claims 1, 4, 5, 9, 10, and 14-23 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Samson (US 5, 505,725).

Applicants respectfully traverse these rejections in view of the amended claims and the following comments.

Discussion of Amended Claims and Telephone Interview with Examiner

On January 3, 2005, Applicants' undersigned counsel conducted a telephone interview with the Examiner to discuss the differences between Applicants' claimed invention and the Samson reference. During this telephone interview, Applicants' counsel pointed out to the Examiner that the lens assembly disclosed in Samson included a tubular reinforcing sleeve 36 for connecting the optical fiber to stem (projection) 33 of the ball lens 32 (Col. 3, lines 60-67). In contrast, with Applicants' claimed invention, the connecting area that accepts the front face of the light guide is provided on an end face of a free standing projection. Accordingly, Applicants' counsel indicated that since a reinforcing sleeve 36 is provided around projection 33 of Samson, the projection 33 cannot be "free standing" as claimed by Applicants. The Examiner indicated that, since the language of claim 1 does not specify that the connection of the light guide is solely via the connecting area, the rejection in view of Samson is proper. However, the Examiner indicated that an amendment to claim 1 clarifying that the light guide is only connected at the connecting area, or specifying the type of connection, would serve to distinguish over the Samson reference. The Examiner agreed to review a proposed amended claim for overcoming the

Samson reference.

On February 22, 2005, Applicants' counsel forwarded amended claim 1 to the Examiner as a proposal for overcoming the Samson reference. On February 23, 2005, after review of the proposed amended claim 1, the Examiner telephoned to indicate that the proposed amended claim 1 would overcome the Samson reference. However, the Examiner indicated that a further search would likely be required such that the proposed amended claim 1 could not be entered after the issuance of the final Office Action without the filing of a Request for Continued Examination (RCE).

In accordance with the discussions with the Examiner, claim 1 is amended herein in accordance with the proposed amendment approved and reviewed by the Examiner, and an RCE is being filed concurrently herewith. As the Examiner has agreed that this amended claim 1 overcomes the Samson reference, withdrawal of the rejections based on Samson is respectfully requested.

Claims 6 and 11, which the Examiner has indicated contain allowable subject matter, are amended into independent form. Claim 17 is amended to depend from claim 11. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 6, 8, 11-13, and 17 are in condition for immediate allowance.

Applicants respectfully submit that the present invention would not have been obvious to one skilled in the art in view of Samson, taken alone or in combination with any of the other prior art of record.

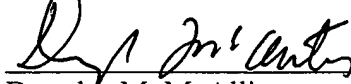
Further remarks regarding the asserted relationship between Applicants' claims and the prior art are not deemed necessary, in view of the amended claims and the foregoing discussion. Applicants' silence as to any of the Examiner's comments is not indicative of an acquiescence to the stated grounds of rejection.

Withdrawal of the rejections under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) is therefore respectfully requested.

Conclusion

The Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider this application, allow each of the pending claims and to pass this application on to an early issue. If there are any remaining issues that need to be addressed in order to place this application into condition for allowance, the Examiner is requested to telephone Applicants' undersigned attorney.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas M. McAllister", is written over a horizontal line.

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